

Dear Elected Official,

I am very concerned that the STRIVE program has been eliminated from the Governor's budget. This highly successful program has helped hundreds of Connecticut's neediest residents secure employment.

STRIVE first came to Connecticut in 1998, and Career Resources now manages the program in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven. It has graduated over three thousand people in that time, with over three hundred participants completing the program just last year. Over the past 6 years, the State of Connecticut invested roughly \$1.3 million into STRIVE. For this investment, 305 graduates were placed into employment. The combined annualized employment income for these graduates was \$5.2 million this translates into \$781,834 in taxes paid annually or nearly a 400% return on investment to the State. Considering that of the 305 graduates placed into employment, 56% were former offenders, 41% were single parents, 80% were receiving some form of public assistance. Also, 20% of participants did not have a H.S. diploma. As you can see, the outcomes here are quite remarkable.

The \$270K saved by the state if this program is terminated is but a fraction of the projected two billion dollar deficit and really has a negligible impact on the overall state budget. It does however have a huge and important impact on the hundreds of low income and disenfranchised populations that graduate from this program annually. The graduates become taxpaying citizens and therefore reduce the state's liability. Many of these graduates were part of federal and state entitlement programs but since being employed full time, they have reduced or eliminated their participation on public benefits. This unique program gives people a chance to achieve the financial independence that they truly desire while also somewhat alleviating the use of entitlement programs.

As a homeless shelter social worker, I see many people who have the desire to work and employable skills-but they also have multiple barriers to obtaining and/or keeping employment. The STRIVE program's unique approach helps participants mitigate those barriers. The program encourages participants to change self-defeating attitudes about themselves and the world around them and teaches them how to successfully navigate the job market and "sell" their skills. It teaches them how to succeed in the workplace and obtain and maintain gainful employment. Our homeless shelter clients need programs like this. This program validates the participants as members of the workforce and society, it encourages them to expect positive things from themselves, and it helps to open doors for people who are used to knocking on door after door that will not or cannot open for them.

I understand that this is a very difficult budget year, but I hope that you will consider finding the resources to fund this highly successful program that has a tremendous impact in the communities that it serves.

Respectfully,
Phoebe Musico